

[The Shoe Machinery Worker]

Section #10 Mass. 1938-9 [?] 10 [1939?] JUL 10, 1939 Name: Jane K. Leary, 32 Acorn St. Informant: Patrick [?]. Ryan, 152 Jackson St. Subject: The Shoe Machinery Worker June 27, 1939 "When I wuz thirteen I quit school and quit helpin' my father in the ten footer an' went ta work in a shoe shop down town. I done what wuz called feedin' the nailer. I put nails in the heal that goes on the shoe and then put the heel on the machine. The operator then fastened the heel on the shoe by the nailin' machine. It wuz called the nailer. "The machine that does that taday is as diffrent taday from that nailer I usta feed as cheese is from chalk. Taday ya don't need a boy ta feed the nails because the machine does it itself. "I fed the nailer fur about three years and then I got a chance ta learn ta last choes shoes . An' I stayed in the lastin' tink rink until 1899 when my father died.

"A lotta the men that worked in the same rink with me, rose up ta something in the years that followed. Jim Daley wuz one of them, "Golden Rule Jimmy" that started the Golden Rule Shoe Shop in Lynn and got up to where he wuz head of four plants an' hired aroun' 2000 men. He wuz good ta the men that worked for him because he rose up from the rink himself and he knew what it wuz like ta 2 be one of the workers himself. I always say that a boy that has ta take his knocks when he's young is more likely ta amount ta somethin' because he knows how ta take it on the chin when he grows up. I heard it said once that a boys that gets his knocks when he's young, is like a snow ball rolled in the snow. It gathers more snow each time it's rolled around. That's the way it wuz with some of them men in the rink. They started workin' in ten footers when they wuz boys, and they knowed what hard work wuz an' wuzn't afraid of it.

"Most a the big men in the country that are really doin' things wuz poor boys. They learned how ta take their knocks and go after what they wanted. They din't jest wait aroun' an' expect someone to do it fur them.

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"Jim failed after awhile and he got some workers down on him because they lost their money. Ya see, he had the workers in his plant own the stock and when he failed, they failed. He wuz jest aimin' ta try it over again though an' he had a lotta men and money back of him too. He woulda made a come back too, only he died jest as he wuz startin'. Too bad. He wuz a good fella, Jim. Not everybody really blamed him, because they know it wuzn't his fault."

My informant was speaking of James Daley, "Golden Rule Jim" as he was famaliarly called by his associates and employees. A laster in his early days, he had risen to fame in organizing and running cooperative shoe factories.

He like my informant had started work in shoe factories at the age of 13, and at 21 was a full fledged laster. After wandering to other shoe centers he finally returned to Lynn and in 1924, with the aid of funds raised by workers from a bankrupt shoe company, and of a former Lynn pastor and mayor, he started his first "Golden Rule" enterprise.

With this start and with about 35 workers, he rose to the head of four plants that employed 2000 workers, and had an annual payroll of \$3,500,000. In his plants was established the first five day week in shoe factories. A fourteen week sick benefit of \$14 was created for the workers. Workers owned a good share of the enterprise of the plants.

The depression took its toll of the liberal and generous policies of "Golden Rule Jim" however, for he failed, losing the investments of his followers. He was not censored universally though, not even by many who had lost heavily, for his integrity was unquestioned, Lynn was rejoicing recently in his movements towards the organization of another "Golden Rule" venture. Just as he was ready to launch the plan however, he died in June, 1939 of heart failure.

My informant expressed the opinion of many in Lynn when he said, "It wuz too bad. Jim wuz a good fella. Lynn'll miss him."

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In 1899 my father died. I got a chance to quit the shoe factory and go to work for my uncle who owned the Bresnahan Machine Factory in Lynn. I never got along good with my uncle but it wuz a good steady job an' I had a young family on my hands at home. I worked there for eleven years when the United bought out my uncle's place and I went over to Beverly. I wuz there for 25 years before I had ta quit.

"It wuz jest five years ago, come this July that I caved in an' had ta quit. First I thought it wuz a shock. I woke up at four o'clock in the mornin' and cun't use my one arm. Cun't even move myself at all hardly. And I never been back to the shop since.

"For sometime before that I knowed I'd havta quit soon. Every time I'd lift that heavy iron shoe last ta fasten it to the beatin' out machine, my heart would beat so, I'd think it wuz goin' to burst right through my shirt. I wuz takin' medicine fur it fur some time, because I wanted to hold out as long as I could. So when the time come, that mornin' at four a'clock I wuzn't sa 5 much surprised. Fur a time there I thought I wuz done fur completely.

"An I guess there wuz others that thought the same thing. They took me to a hospital after a while. And some even thought I had a cancer. An' they wanted ta ship me clear out ta the western parta the state ta a cancer home. But my wife spoke up to the doctor.

"You got a mother has the cancer, ain't ya?', she asked him.

" 'Yes', he told her.

"Well, would ya send her ta a home ta die?

"No', he said, 'But you ain't well yourself, How can you look after him?'

"don't you worry none about that. If he's got a cancer and is agonna die, he kin come home. He'll get looked after!

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"My wife had four operations herself, ya see. She wuzn't well. But she brought me home. An' ya know I din't have a cancer at all. I seen a doctor some time after an he said, 'You ain't got no more cancer than I got.'

"An' if I'da gone out ta that home, like as not, they'da cut an' cut, jest ta try ta find out somethin'. That's all right if a man is dead but I don't want no experimentin' on me long's I'm alive. I get too much satisfaction outa livin'.

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"I knowed a man an' he din't have no family left but a nephew. An' they sent him there. Then they come ta operate, they hada have some one sign the papers so they went to the nephew.

"'sure, I'll sign,' said the nephew. And he did.

"Well sir, they cut that man this way an' that way. And a course he died. My wife din't want them ta do that ta me."

"We're both pretty happy. We got enough to get along on an' we don't havta ask nothin' a our children. 'stead a that we're helpin' them.

"After I wuz outa work a whole year ant they seen at the shoe machinery that I cun't come back atall they give my son a job in place a me, besides helpin' me with them checks I told ya about and givin' me stocks.

"And them stocks with the others I bought are worth more'n eight hundred dollars today. I kin go right down ta the bank any time I want an' borrow money on that. Two years ago when my wife an' daughter wanted to go back ta Ireland ta see her mother I went down an' raised the money fur her ta go. Got five hundred dollars. Since then I paid that back and not along ago my son come ta me an' said, 'I want ta build a garage on my land.'

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"I told me I'd borrow on them stocks agin if he'd 7 pay the intrist regular and the principal when he could. So we went down ta the bank and raised \$200 just like snappin' your finger. He built the garage, and he's paid the intrist every time it's come due too. He ain't paid the principle yet, but he's good fur it.

"I helped my other children too, all except the one's that single. She works at the shoe machinery too an' gets her \$22 every week. No sir, my children don't need ta do nothin' fur us. We're the ones that helpin' them. An' I'm glad of it too. There's nothin' like bein' able ta take care a yourself.